



Senator Brian Weinstein

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END OF SESSION REVIEW

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- Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education, Vice Chair
- Transportation



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Dear Neighbors,

The 2005 legislative session has wrapped up, and I'm happy to report that it was an extremely productive one for Washington families.

I came to Olympia knowing that lawmakers would face some tough decisions this year. We had to find a way to write a budget that protected schools, health care and the environment while fixing a \$1.7 billion shortfall. We had to come up with a plan to update Washington's transportation system, which in some cases is literally crumbling before our eyes. And we had to reform our elections system so voters can be confident in the legitimacy of the process.

We accomplished these goals and more. As vice chair of the Senate Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education Committee, I believe this was a banner year for education in our state. We boosted higher education enrollment significantly, invested in reducing class sizes and giving teachers well-deserved cost-of-living adjustments, and launched a project to give parents more information about quality preschool options in their communities.

We had great success this year in making Washington the kind of state we all can be proud to live in. I am honored to be the voice of the 41st Legislative District in Olympia, and appreciate hearing from you. Please don't hesitate to get in touch with my office with questions or comments.

Sincerely,

Sen. Brian Weinstein

A Report to the 41st District

Education

I was privileged to serve as vice chair of the Senate Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education Committee this session. It gave me a firsthand look at what we need to do so that every student – rural or urban, rich or poor – has access to a world-class education.

We made great progress. At the request of the governor, I sponsored Senate Bill 5441, which calls for a



Gov. Christine Gregoire signs SB 5441, sponsored by Sen. Weinstein.

comprehensive study of the way we pay for public education in our state, including early learning, K-12 schools, and our state colleges and universities. The budget includes \$1.7 million for this study. This will give us the tools to determine whether we are spending every state education dollar efficiently and what it will take to live up to our constitutional mandate that education be the paramount duty of the state.

We also created the Education Legacy Trust Fund, which will fund Initiative 728 to lower class sizes and Initiative 732 to give teachers cost-of-living increases. This was something the voters asked for, yet both initiatives had been suspended the past two years. Revenue from the cigarette tax and the reinstated estate tax will be devoted to the trust fund.

Our colleges and universities are bursting at the seams. We'll need an additional 26,000 enrollment slots by 2010 just to keep up with current demand. This session, we took a big step toward addressing this enrollment crunch by expanding access to baccalau-

reate degrees at our four-year schools, branch campuses, and community and technical colleges.

The operating budget includes 7,900 additional enrollment slots. House Bill 1794 allows some branch campuses to begin offering lower-level courses, and it sets up a pilot program for community and technical colleges to offer select bachelor's degrees in high-demand fields.

Among the other education victories this session:

- This year's capital budget devotes a record level of money to school construction so that students will be able to learn in safe, modern facilities.
- House Bill 1152 establishes an early learning council that will provide Washington parents with better information on quality child care and early learning options in our state.
- We reconstituted the roles of the State Board of Education and the Professional Educator Standards Board. This gives education practitioners governance authority over the profession. It is important to have a clear line of authority when it comes to making public education decisions.
- The budget includes \$10.4 million more for special education, and money to train teachers in instructing students with dyslexia and other language disabilities. Further, we changed the funding formula for the Learning Assistance Program (LAP), which provides extra help for students struggling with basic skills. This is the fair way to do it: Schools no longer will be financially penalized for successfully raising test scores.

Unfortunately, a proposal to allow a simple majority of voters to approve school district levies and bonds was once again blocked. Senate Democrats fought hard for it, but we simply were not able to get the necessary votes to pass this common-sense measure.

Protecting our environment

This was a groundbreaking year for environmental legislation. We made decisions that will help preserve Washington's uniquely beautiful environment for future generations.

More than half of the pollution in the air we breathe comes straight from cars' tailpipes. This year, the Legislature approved breakthrough environmental legislation making Washington the ninth state to adopt more rigorous auto emission standards. Not only will this improve public health, it will reduce our dependence on foreign oil.

We also approved a cutting-edge "green buildings" measure that requires publicly funded buildings to use modern construction techniques resulting in a healthier environment. The standards emphasize efficient use of energy and water.

We took steps to protect the Puget Sound by establishing the Citizens' Oil Spill Advisory Council to monitor oil terminal and tanker operations and take a close look at our current oil spill contingency plans. We must be proactive in protecting our state's waterways.





Eastside a winner in 2005 transportation budget

As a member of the Senate Transportation Committee, fixing our statewide transportation mess was one of my top priorities this session. Improving the flow of traffic and the availability of alternative transportation options is one of the most important issues in our region – both on the eastside and around Puget Sound.

Clogged roadways are a drain on quality of life, and they are a drain on the economy. Nowhere is this more evident than in Puget Sound. We need safe, up-to-date roadways that move people and goods efficiently if Washington is to be seen as a good place to live and to do business. We also need a variety of alternative transit options for commuters. Encouraging mass transit is good for our roads and it's good for the environment.

Our committee crafted a wide-ranging plan to improve Washington's roadways. The proposal we came up with was dubbed the Transportation Partnerships Fund and invests in transportation improvements around the state with some commitment at the local level.

The idea of the fund was to build on the 2003 "nickel package" by raising \$9.1 billion during the next 16 years to finance projects aimed at improving public safety, the state economy, our environment and ultimately the quality of life for Washington's drivers. The Legislature approved the package on the final day of the 2005 session.

The final transportation budget is environmentally friendly: It includes \$814 million for public transportation options. Giving commuters more alternatives will go a long

way toward cleaning up our air and cutting down on traffic. Specifically, we focused on commute trip reduction tax credits, which encourage employers to create programs that reduce drive-alone commuting. And we made significant investments in regional and commuter bus service; passenger rail; and park and ride lots.

We also increased funding for the Safe Routes to Schools program, providing grants to school districts to improve walking and biking routes. This not only will help prevent tragic accidents, it will encourage students to get more exercise, reduce car trips, and create public amenities that enhance quality of life and make neighborhoods more attractive and family-friendly.

Just as important, the Transportation Partnerships Fund is a plan that delivers for the eastside. It includes \$972 million to relieve traffic congestion and interchange safety improvements along Interstate 405.

The package also invests in replacing the worn state Route 520 floating bridge and the Alaskan Way Viaduct, both critical pieces of the Puget Sound transportation system that must be replaced. While congestion along these routes is a chronic problem, public safety is now the driving force behind the push for solutions.

The viaduct, while not on the eastside, affects our traffic greatly and is a disaster waiting to happen. Another earthquake like the 2001 Nisqually earthquake could bring the structure down if we don't act soon. The budget includes \$2 billion for the viaduct.

The 520 floating bridge also must be replaced. The 40-year-old structure provides a vital connection between Seattle and the eastside, but it has been weakened by storms and earthquakes. Some \$500 million is in the budget to build a new bridge.

This was a great session for Washington's transportation system. I'm very committed to making the hard decisions to make sure we on the eastside have safe, reliable roads that connect us to Seattle and to the rest of the state.

Budget

Faced with a \$1.7 billion shortfall this year, we still passed a budget that invests in schools and in health care, and we did it without a general tax increase. Among the budget highlights:

- Increased spending on K-12, including more for special education students
- 7,900 additional higher education enrollment slots
- Maintaining the Basic Health Plan at 100,000 enrollees
- Providing premium-free children's medical coverage
- Giving state employees – who provide some of the most valuable services in the state, yet haven't received a raise in three years – a cost-of-living adjustment.

We did approve a modest revenue package: We reinstituted a version of the estate tax that was in effect when the session began, but that was affected by a court decision during the session. Fortunately, it applies only to estates of

\$1.5 million and up this year, and \$2 million and up next year. It will apply to only about 250 estates per year.

The Legislature also approved a 60-cent per-pack tax on cigarettes. Revenue from both measures is dedicated to supporting K-12 and higher education.

Let's be clear: No one ever wants to raise taxes. But we have to make tough choices to make sure Washington is a great place to live and to do business. We're making progress on that front: I believe Washington has an excellent business climate that is only improving. The Progressive Policy Institute ranks Washington first in economic dynamism, The Small Business & Entrepreneurship Council ranks us the fourth friendliest environment for entrepreneurship, and the Tax Foundation ranks our state ninth for business-friendly tax climates.

We need clean and safe communities. We need great schools. We need a strong economy. And we need affordable health care for every citizen.

This budget is a reflection of what our state needs to move forward – to be the best state in the country.



Capital Budget

The 2005-2007 capital budget makes a strong investment in educational and recreational opportunities in the 41st District:

- \$7.6 million for a science and technology building at Bellevue Community College; \$700,000 for flood damage.
- \$2.9 million to replace the facilities Renton Technical College uses for some technology programs.
- \$5 million for water, sewer and storm water-related infrastructure repair improvements as part of the redevelopment project on the surplus Boeing property in north Renton.
- \$350,000 for the Salvation Army of Renton.
- \$400,000 for the Seward Park Environmental and Audubon Center.
- \$400,000 for a synthetic sports field at Robinswood Park in Bellevue.
- \$750,000 for the acquisition of Meydenbauer Bay waterfront.

Health Care

To provide for the healthiest citizenry, our health care system should address both physical well-being and mental health. We passed several measures this session that will keep Washington's families healthy in both mind and body.

In terms of mental health, we passed legislation that requires insurance companies to offer the same coverage for mental health treatment as they do for physical conditions. This so-called "mental health parity" should help boost access to treatment for those suffering from a mental illness.

We also replaced \$80 million in federal Medicaid cuts, which will help protect state mental-health programs, and approved a groundbreaking piece of legislation that streamlines services for the mentally ill and chemically dependent. The current treatment system for these often co-occurring disorders is expensive and inefficient; the new system will get appropriate services to those who need them the most, thus relieving the burden on our emergency, crisis and correctional facilities.

We set in motion a plan that will assure all children in our state have health care coverage by the year 2010, and we maintained adult enrollment in the Basic Health Plan. We also took action to mitigate the soaring cost of prescription drugs. We approved a measure that, if the Food and Drug Administration approves it, will allow residents to purchase medicines imported from Canada and other countries, and one that expands the state's prescription drug purchasing consortium. Prescription drug prices have skyrocketed, and it's hitting Washington residents hard – particularly the elderly.

Civil rights

A measure to protect gays and lesbians from discrimination in housing, banking and insurance matters was brought to a vote on the Senate floor for the first time in 30 years. Unfortunately, it was defeated by a single vote, and not a single Republican voted for it.

I can think of no other issue this session that spoke so deeply about what our state stands for. This was not about gay marriage, or even about civil unions. It was a conservative bill, supported by many of Washington's leading businesses, that simply protects gays and lesbians in the same way our state protects others. While it was incredibly disappointing to watch this measure fail, I believe the pendulum is swinging toward equal rights for all Washington citizens.